

## Hazardous Trees Turned to Heat

*Shannon Gilbert, Dillon FO*

Hazardous trees that had threatened the integrity of historical buildings in the Alder Gulch area will warm the homes of disadvantaged families this winter.

Several trees around the historical Christenot and Garrison mills in southwestern Montana were leaning precariously toward the buildings. In late August, arborist Jim Hicks performed the complex task of felling trees without damaging the 1860s-era structures.

Once down, the trees were cut to appropriate lengths for firewood and loaded into a dump truck. The wood was donated to the Wood Bank Ministry, a charitable group in Dillon, which will split and deliver it to disadvantaged families for heating their homes.

Dillon Field Office employees Jason Strahl, Shannon Gilbert, Kipper Blotkamp, Harry Poppe, Johanna Nosal, and Ben Christiansen participated in the project.

Arborist Jim Hicks works to remove a hazardous tree that was leaning toward a historical building in Alder Gulch.



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## A Note from our Associate State Director

I've always appreciated this time of year and the opportunity to look forward and reflect on the past. It has been quite a year in a number of our programs. I won't attempt to include every example, but certainly the following touched large segments of our workforce:

- The ARRA initiative. Preparing those projects for a contract or agreement has been a top priority. Projects were submitted from virtually all points of the compass. We now know that schedules and timelines for completion have been accelerated. This is a huge workload and obviously the end products are so very important to local economies and contribute to the national economy as well.
- Our planning process. We now have six resource management plans at various stages. I can't remember a time when we were placing this much focus all at one time and in so many places. With the HiLine, Billings, Miles City, North and South Dakota, and now a preplan for Missoula, it is almost easier to say where we are NOT doing planning as opposed to running through the list above!
- Record oil and gas lease sales. Primarily on the strength of leasing interest in North Dakota, our lease sales were among the largest bureauwide. Many of you have faced the tasks of meeting that workload and the shifting areas of interest.
- Other examples include ramping up for renewable energy projects; arriving at a sustainable plan for protecting sensitive species such as sage grouse; meeting the mandate for an emphasis on youth programs; responding to a number of requests for specific resource information; providing training and orientation for our newer employees; and adjusting to the changes in a variety of our "systems."

Frankly, it's hard to quit when listing the various significant workloads of the last year.

As an organization we evolved internally as well, moving from a two-tier to a three-tier organization. The plan is in place, but we continue to address its impacts and consequences.

What does the year ahead have in store? If we had one, our crystal ball would likely indicate that we can expect more of the same.



Your management team will continue to review and decide on the best approach to shifting priorities and their impacts on jobs and funding. Our commitment remains the same: to assure the long term health of the organization including the proper management of our workforce. We must address the additional workload as well as attrition as people become eligible for retirement. Admittedly, we don't do that work perfectly, and yes, we have made mistakes. I would offer it wasn't for a lack of effort. Our workforce is our number one resource and responsibility, and Gene and I and your entire management team are absolutely committed to it.

We hope that as the calendar year closes, this finds you and your family in good health and enjoying the opportunities that living in Montana and the Dakotas offers. Within your families are people in service to our country in the military. Our thoughts and prayers are with you and them as well. There is no higher priority than your families and your health. We hope we all remember those relative priorities and appreciate that we get to work in an organization that holds those values.

Gene and I would like to wish each and every one of you all the best in the upcoming year.

And on a personal note, at least I don't have to say "wait until next year" relative to the past baseball season. Boy, does that feel good for a change.

Howard A. Lemm  
Associate State Director

# Youth, Local Volunteers Team Up to Help BLM Remove Fence

*Story and photos by David Abrams*

On a cool, autumn morning, Kelly Bockting looked across the sage-covered landscape at the Palisades Recreation Site and nodded his approval. The fence was finally coming down.

Along a bluff overlooking the Madison River, teams of volunteers and BLM employees were rolling wire into small bales and yanking stubborn posts out of the ground.

Bockting, a wildlife biologist with the Dillon Field Office, explained that sheep once grazed this area 20 miles south of Ennis, but now it is a vital big-game route. The 50-year-old fence crisscrossing the land was a barrier and entanglement hazard; it had to go. "It's really bad for wildlife movement," he said.

"This is not just a playground for fisherman and campers, it is also a place where the elk and antelope roam," Bockting said. "The Palisades provides year-round habitat for antelope and is a migration corridor and winter habitat for elk."

Now, thanks to a volunteer effort, the deer and the antelope have a little more freedom to play.

On Aug. 27, six volunteers from the Madison Valley Ranchlands Group and Madison River Foundation, 13 BLM employees, and two Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks employees removed one-and-a-half miles of the old fence.

One month later, 17 BLM employees, six Montana Youth Challenge Academy cadets and seven volunteers from Madison River Foundation went back to finish the project. They hauled away a total of nearly three miles of fence. The Youth Challenge cadets earned community service hours as they wrestled with the old wire, some of which, over time, had embedded firmly into the ground.

As he leaned back to pull out a fence post, 17-year-old Cameron Cables from Belgrade talked about the importance of the day's work. "I want to see access to these areas because I like to come down here a lot," he said. "I want to be a part of everything, especially if it means making it easier for wildlife to move around."

As she worked with the young volunteers rolling up wire and clearing the land, Dillon's Assistant Field



Heather Anderson and Nelson Rowley, Ennis residents and members of the Madison River Foundation, roll up a bale of wire while helping BLM employees remove three miles of 50-year-old sheep fence at the Palisades Recreation Site Sept. 29.



Kelly Urresti, a range technician with the Dillon Field Office, and Billy White, a 16-year-old Montana Youth Challenge Academy volunteer from Thompson Falls, clear brush away while removing three miles of 50-year-old sheep fence at the Palisades Recreation Site Sept. 29.

Manager for Renewable Resources Pat Fosse said, "The Montana Youth Challenge Academy kids worked so hard to do a good job for us today and everyone was very impressed with them. They really deserve a pat on the back."



# Newly Acquired Properties Block Up Public Land and Protect Natural Resources

The Conservation Fund has helped the BLM acquire some acreage in southern Montana that will protect natural resources and block up public land for a variety of public uses.

## Meeteetse Spires

In early November, the Billings Field Office completed the first phase of a 560-acre acquisition of private land adjoining the Meeteetse Spires Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). Located along the eastern slopes of the Beartooth Mountains about six miles south of Red Lodge, the area mirrors the same high scenic qualities of the Meeteetse Spires.

“It’s a beautiful area surrounded by BLM and Forest Service land,” said Tom Carroll, realty specialist. “There was a tremendous amount of public support for this acquisition.”

The property had been subdivided into 20- and 40-acre parcels; further development would have threatened the acquired lands and adjoining ACEC.

Now publicly owned, the property will allow for much improved public access to the ACEC and Custer National Forest lands.

A rare plant species called *Shoshonea pulvinata*, which occurs in fewer than 12 locations worldwide, is found in the property’s upper elevations. The area also holds special importance for the Crow Tribe.

The Conservation Fund purchased the entire 560-acre parcel in June 2009 with the intent that the BLM would purchase it in two phases. The first phase, consisting of about 300 acres, is complete. The BLM hopes to complete the second phase this winter. Money from the Land and Water Conservation Fund was used for the purchase.

The newly acquired property will be managed in a way that closely follows the allowed activities on the adjoining Meeteetse Spires ACEC. The 560 acres will be considered for inclusion in the current Meeteetse Spires ACEC in the revision of the Billings/Pompeys Pillar Resource Management Plan, which is underway.

## Pumpkin Creek Ranch

Also in early November, the Miles City Field Office formally closed on the second and final phase of



The BLM acquired a 560-acre block of land next to the rugged Meeteetse Spires ACEC using money from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. *Photo by Peter Bierbach*

a land exchange involving the former Pumpkin Creek Ranch located about 15 miles south of Miles City.

BLM Eastern Montana/Dakotas District Manager Elaine Raper expressed delight in completing the exchange which now brings the entire block of former private land into public ownership.

“Finalizing the last sections completes the efforts of many individuals to create a considerable area the public can enjoy,” she said. “We appreciate our partners who have dedicated their time and resources to make this happen.”

Raper also credited Pam Wall, Miles City Field Office realty specialist, and The Nature Conservancy’s Mark Sommer, who both played significant roles in completing the project in a timely and professional manner.

The BLM, with the support of The Conservation Fund, began work on the assembled land exchange proposal in 2003. The final phase acquired about 1,800 acres of private land remaining within the Pumpkin Creek Ranch using federal lands in Carter County.

“We appreciate the patience and willingness of both the landowners where the lands were acquired and those landowners who purchased parcels in Carter County in order to make this exchange happen,” said Debbie Johnson, assistant field manager.

The exchange created a block of approximately 20,556 acres of federal land available for a variety of public uses as well as the management of BLM resource programs. A detailed management plan will be completed to address various resource uses in the area.



The Pumpkin Creek Ranch is now in public ownership thanks to an assembled land exchange completed with the assistance of The Conservation Fund. *Photo by Mark E. Jacobsen*

## Restoration Work at the Historic Zortman Guard Station

*Alicia Beat, Havre Field Office; and Jody Miller, Glasgow Field Office*

For well over a century the Zortman guard station in Zortman, Mont., contributed to this area’s rich history. Now, the BLM is taking steps to ensure the historic structure will remain for another 100 years.

The BLM acquired the Zortman guard station and its nearby garage from the Jefferson National Forest in the 1960s. The guard station was originally built in 1905, making the structure over 100 years old and eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. It is the only known standing historic structure currently managed by the BLM’s HiLine District Office.

The guard station and garage most recently housed the BLM’s Lewistown-Zortman fire crews, but they have not been fully utilized since the BLM constructed new fire facilities (office/warehouse/bunkhouse/water system) in Zortman in the late 1990s.

Without use and maintenance, the buildings were naturally deteriorating. As part of the BLM’s responsibility to maintain National Register eligible properties, HiLine District archaeologists Alicia Beat and Jody Miller prepared a restoration plan to preserve the guard station and garage.

Since 2008, the HiLine cultural resource management program has been actively working to restore the Zortman guard station. The primary concern was to reduce the lead hazard on the exterior of the buildings. The next two concerns were to replace the roofs and improve water drainage away from the foundations.

Through an intra-agency agreement, the U.S. Forest Service Region 1 Historic Preservation Team has been working one to two weeks each summer replacing the roofs and siding on the cabin and garage as

well as addressing drainage issues around each structure. Using this intra-agency agreement with the R1 Preservation Team allows the BLM to stretch its cultural resource budget to the maximum extent possible. The R1 team will be back in 2010, to finish siding the guard station and the garage.

When this project is completed, the exterior of the Zortman guard station and garage will be fully restored, which will hopefully allow these structures to contribute to the area’s future for another 100 years.



The Forest Service Region I Team installs a new roof on the historic Zortman guard station.

## LOG GULCH CAMPGROUND GETS FACELIFT AFTER FIRE

*Story and photo by David Abrams, Western Montana District*

In early September, the Indian Trail fire burned across 271 acres of BLM-administered lands near Holter Lake. Though no Log Gulch Campground structures were damaged, campsites and other portions of the campground area were burned by the fire. BLM officials closed Log Gulch on Sept. 10 in order to protect the public.

Snow is now blanketing the ash at Log Gulch Campground, but before winter set in, a crew of 10 BLM employees—six from the Miles City Field Office and four from the Lewistown Field Office fire crews—made sure the soil was stable and hazard trees were removed.

Nearly \$100,000 was approved for emergency stabilization of Log Gulch Campground. The funding was based on a report by an Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation team from the BLM's Butte Field Office which assessed the recreation site after the flames were doused.

The ESR report stated that “the three drainages that flow through the campground and the steep slope above the parking area all burned at high severity, leaving little to no live ground vegetation or live trees.” This resulted in the risk of soil, ash or debris movement, making for unstable conditions for those using or working at the campground.

According to the funding memo, the stabilization treatments, in order of priority, were the removal of hazard trees; protecting the public and BLM resources from debris flows from the upper watershed; protecting the public and public water supplies from mass movements and floods from the small drainages in

the campground; and reducing sediment delivery and excessive runoff from BLM lands draining towards the county road.

Thanks to the efforts of the BLM employees from Butte, Miles City and Lewistown, 11.4 acres of severely burned hill-slopes were stabilized and 99 log erosion barriers and 12 erosion check dams were installed. In addition, all burned trees which created a safety hazard within approximately 100 feet of the campground were felled, bucked, and stacked. The

teams got the work done at whiplash speed.

Corey Meier, soil scientist with the Butte Field Office and project lead, was very impressed with the work done at Log Gulch. “Because the team was so efficient and effective, they finished what we anticipated to be 10 days’ work ahead of schedule,” he said. “So, we took advantage of their presence to have them work on non-

fire related work for the

remaining three days, including cleaning hazard trees out of two recreation sites on the Big Hole River and cutting trees to construct a log barrier along a riparian area in Patton Gulch.”

In early December, one more thing remained in the Log Gulch treatment: 175 acres of the most severely-burned areas would be treated with aerial seeding to improve the integrity of the ecosystem.

When the campground re-opens next spring, Meier said the public can expect to see vegetation re-establishing on the burned ground as a result of the combination of slope stabilization/sediment capture and seeding.



Picnic tables, the boat dock and tenting areas at BLM's Log Gulch Campground were all spared from the flames of the Indian Trail Fire which swept along the Holter Lake shoreline in September. Within weeks after the flames were doused, emergency stabilization and rehabilitation work had begun.



# BLM Access Team Addresses Public Need -

*Story and photo by Mark E. Jacobsen, Eastern Montana/Dakotas District*

The Miles City Field Office Access Team has addressed a series of access-related concerns on eastern Montana BLM land; the most recent was the Lone Tree project located about nine miles south of Jordan in Garfield County.

The Lone Tree project area includes several BLM sections accessible from State Highway 59; these link to a partial section of state land, giving access to an additional 12-plus sections of federal land. Due to the somewhat flat topography, the surrounding private land and the lack of adjacent block management parcels, public access was confusing and problematic.

Boundary posting of the first phase of the project was completed Sept. 16, clarifying the boundaries and removing some of the guesswork for the public. The rest of the project will be completed at a later date.

The Miles City FO Access Team identified this area as a "Tier 4" project and later confirmed the need for signage with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Region 7.

To better prioritize action items, team members devised a methodology in February 2008 to separate projects into four categories or "tiers." The tier levels categorize projects according to their complexity, expense and how much time they would require.

A Tier 4 project is generally the least expensive and time-consuming of the

levels and is commonly addressed by boundary signing, easement identification and alternative route development. Sometimes it's as simple as ensuring BLM maps are updated accurately. Tier 3 projects deal with easement acquisition, both short and long-term. Tier 2 projects cover travel management scenarios, and Tier 1 items deal with land exchanges.

Access team members have met with local sportsmen and have added team members from Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Montana Department of Environmental Quality, and the Custer National Forest who have requested involvement and input.

All Miles City FO Access Team staff volunteered and come from a variety of resource disciplines. Access work projects are accomplished in addition to the team members' regular work assignments.

Partnering with Montana FWP Regions 6 and 7 has been particularly productive from both a manpower and team perspective; both FWP regions have completed extensive BLM boundary signing projects in several counties beginning in the early 2009 through the summer.

The Miles City FO and FWP Regions 6 and 7 share GPS data on sign locations, building a database to accurately reflect what is on the ground. Miles City FO summer seasonal personnel have also assisted in ground-truthing roads and easements, which has improved project lists accuracy and additional access options.

Currently the team is tracking 121 projects and will add more as the team meets to discuss findings by BLM staff and FWP through the remainder of 2009.



Miles City FO GIS specialist Jen Nagy posts a boundary marker on the Lone Tree access project in Garfield County Aug. 11. Previously, the popular area had no signage which made both trespass onto adjacent private property and access to BLM land a problem.

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## Intensive Effort Transforms 17-Mile Recreation Area -

*Based on a report by Tom Allen, Member of the Board of Directors for the Public Lands Foundation*

The 17-Mile area north of Billings has long been popular for target shooting. For many years, it was also dumping ground for everything from shell casings to refrigerators. Periodic cleanups helped, but it would only be a day or two before trash started piling up again. Users were unwilling to take responsibility, claiming that the garbage was there when they arrived. The dismal pattern seemed destined to continue.

When some livestock were shot and killed on adjacent private land, however, it was evident that the problems were not limited to the 17-Mile site and that a new approach was needed. The BLM hosted public

meetings to gather comments and suggestions. While some people recommended closing the area completely, others, including Billings Field Office Law Enforcement Ranger Chuck Ward, believed that BLM could fix what was wrong and keep it open.

The BLM started by closing the area for a two-week cleanup in early September 2006--right before hunting season when hunters wanted to sight in their rifles. Many grumbled about the closure, but only a few stepped up to help with the cleanup. In those two weeks, a couple dozen volunteers removed 50 cubic yards of trash from an area that gets 3,000 visitor-days a year.

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When the 17-Mile area re-opened, Ward parked his rig at the entrance and greeted every vehicle that came in. He made sure that every group had a copy of the Billings Field Office's shooting safety brochure, and let them know that targets were limited to steel, paper, and clay pigeons. He also made it clear that users were expected to pick up all their target materials and shell casings before leaving. The standard was pack-it-in, pack-it-out, with zero tolerance.

"When we re-opened, I was there," said Ward. "They were coming into my territory instead of me entering theirs, and for the most part, people were glad to see me there."

People who arrived with appliances, glass bottles, paint cans, pumpkins, furniture, pallets, and such were told to take them back home. Shooters who seemed somewhat careless, young, and inexperienced, or who had AK 47-type rifles were more carefully monitored. Every hour or so, Ward would drive by all the shooting stations and do compliance checks. All of it was done with the goal of creating allies in keeping the site clean and safe. The few citations he issued were given to people who had previously been advised of the policies.

"My goal was to educate, not to hammer people," he said. "I wanted them to be on our side."



It used to be common to find space heaters and other appliances riddled with bullet holes at the 17-Mile Area. An intensive cleanup and education effort led by BLM law enforcement ranger Chuck Ward has transformed the site into a much cleaner and safer place for target shooting.

The motivation was there. A similar site known as the 8-Mile Area had been closed, cleaned up, and sold several years earlier because of similar issues, so the shooting public knew what was at stake.

For the next several months, BLM law enforcement was present at 17-Mile at least one day every weekend. They handed out thousands of brochures. On some days Ward talked to as many as 300 users.

Not surprisingly, individuals who were prone to litter even after the initial contact and brochure distribution also had other criminal issues. BLM rangers made four arrests for felons in possession of firearms. FBI agents made one as well. The county sheriff and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks also became involved with enforcement. As the word spread that criminals had a good chance of being arrested, prosecuted, and sent to prison, as well as losing their guns, they started to stay away from 17-Mile.

Ward recruited Robert Carns, a volunteer from the cleanup effort, to help monitor 17-Mile. In an extremely cost effective arrangement, Carns spent one full day each week at the site in exchange for mileage reimbursement. In addition to talking with users and handing out brochures, he removed a pickup truck load of trash every week.

These efforts worked. Public behavior at the site changed. People who resented the law enforcement presence and having to comply with the rules stayed away. Responsible shooters and family groups returned, enjoying the cleaner, safer environment. Members of the public started calling Ward to report violations in progress and suspect vehicle information. Shooters began to clean up after themselves and hold each other accountable.

Besides enforcing the rules, BLM personnel went out of their way to give users a good experience at 17-Mile. By helping shooters with malfunctions and other firearm issues, and loaning target stands and other equipment, BLM law enforcement earned the site users' respect and appreciation. Additionally, BLM equipment operator Rick Ekwortzel graded the adjacent road and cut a ditch and berm in front of the shooting lanes, further deterring people from hauling in large items. Users are enjoying the ditch and berm and say it should have been done years earlier.

The turnaround at 17-Mile took about ten hours a week of ranger time for two and a half years. The expectation that the site would always be trashed and dangerous has changed to the expectation that it is clean and orderly. These expectations have become self-fulfilling as the BLM goes into maintenance mode at 17-Mile.



# Campfire Brainstorm Sparks New Partnership

*Craig Flentie, Lewistown District Office*

Some of our best ideas come from the most casual of settings.

Not long ago several BLMers (Gene Terland, Stan Benes, Gary Slagel, Mark Schaefer and Wade Brown) went on an overnight site visit along the Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River. The evening campfire conversation was typical of such a setting and included weighty topics related to river management and recreation.

Midway through the evening, Lewistown District Manager Stan Benes asked how we could better expose Native American students to the work BLM does along the river, and inform them of the career opportunities that kind of work can provide. The question drew considerable thought and all were advocates of the concept.

They all agreed that this program would have to be a partnership between or among the BLM and tribal colleges in the region; that it would require clearly defined roles, responsibilities and benefits for all involved; and that it would have to provide hands-on learning, entry level compensation and college credits for participants, and on-the-ground workload assistance for BLM.

The task of developing the concept fell to Mark Schaefer. It wasn't easy, but through persistence and contacts, he completed a draft plan.

As with many new concepts, however, funding became the biggest obstacle to implementation.

That's when Sara Romero-Minkoff, MSO equal employment opportunity manager, became

involved. Her knowledge of Washington Office grants and programs involving diversity issues proved invaluable. After multiple meetings and discussions with Mark, she opted to submit a funding application to the WO Educational Outreach Division. The project's potential merits competed very well with other applications and the partnership was selected for funding.

the potential of this Educational Outreach Partnership. This spring, the SKC became the first tribal college to formalize an agreement with the BLM.

The SKC is contributing by developing a Wildland Recreation Management practicum that includes classes featuring wildland recreation, facilities planning and maintenance, monitoring, restoration and public education.



Preparing for patrol on the Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River, (left to right) SKC student Benny Everett; Park Ranger Steve Swanson; SKC student Josh McGreevey; and park rangers Marian Ekweogwu and Jim Barrowman.

Thanks in large part to persistent efforts from Mark and Sara, the educational outreach partnership idea was designed, funded and ready to present to potential partners.

## SKC Signs On

Salish Kootenai College (SKC) on the Flathead Indian Reservation in Pablo, Mont., is experienced with working with federal agency programs and quickly recognized

Each topic will include lectures by SKC faculty and BLM resource specialists.

Students will benefit by completing college credits, gaining hands-on experience, acquiring additional exposure to diverse natural resource-related projects, and earning compensation while working summers for BLM. Additionally, the program may be a gateway to a BLM career in resource management.

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The BLM will benefit from additional outreach to under-represented minority groups, a more diverse workforce, and potential job recruitment and assistance with numerous tasks such as river patrols, launch site and interpretive center staffing, and on-the-ground work projects.

Not long after the BLM and SKC had agreed to this partnership, its first two participants were enrolled and ready to report for duty. Benny Everett and Josh McGreevey, both second year forestry majors at SKC, arrived at the Fort Benton River Management Station somewhat curious about what their roles would be.

Josh and Benny spent their first couple of days steeped in the standard orientation sessions required for seasonal park rangers. The topics included equipment issue and familiarization, driver training, watercraft familiarization, hazards, safety and ethics. Orientation time also included open discussions regarding the objectives of this educational outreach partnership and the students' expectations, responsibilities and duty schedules.

With information overload weighing heavily in their minds, Benny and Josh soon found solace working on the river with the guidance of a great mentor. Paired up with Jim Barrowman, a third year seasonal river ranger, Josh and Benny progressed smoothly into their recreation-based responsibilities.

From that point on, the summer work season passed quickly. Throughout the summer, Benny and Josh found themselves involved with and learning from everyone on the river staff as well as a wide variety of BLM resource specialists. Each of these BLMers served as a great tutor for topics including riparian management, invasive weeds, archeology, rangeland management and forestry.

By the end of the summer, both students had developed a good working knowledge about the BLM's multiple programs and lauded the BLM staff's knowledge, professionalism and work ethic. Both Benny and Josh enjoyed the experience. They felt it was a summer well spent with the most satisfying portion being the time spent on the river. Josh summed it up when asked if he had any advice for future students.

"I would tell them to be ready to camp and paddle (canoes)," he said with a smile.

"Overall, I thought the partnership was a huge success," observed Mark Schaefer. "I think we met 90 percent of our objectives and everyone involved is quite satisfied with the fledgling program. As with many new undertakings, there is always room for improvement and we have a feel for what BLM can do to make this educational partnership better. We will be working with BLM resource specialists this winter to further refine the work experiences and lessons available with the partnership."

The BLM looks forward to continuing this program and has already started a dialogue with faculty members from other tribal colleges to inform them of its potential.



Benny Everett and Josh McGreevey take a break during a trip to Square Butte. Benny and Josh were the first two students to participate in BLM's Educational Outreach Partnership.

"This partnership could not have gotten off the ground without a great team effort from the BLM at every level, Schaefer added. "Gene Terland, Stan Benes and Gary Slagel all lent their full support, and Sara Romero-Minkoff's perseverance and knowledge of funding mechanisms in the Washington Office were absolutely critical to the successful outcome."

This educational outreach partnership is an example of an out-of-the-box idea that has the potential to provide real dividends.

Perhaps BLM should schedule more discussions around a campfire.



# BLM Hands Out Beetles for Spurge Control

*Story and photos by Mark E. Jacobsen, Miles City Field Office*

Visiting Brenda Witkowski, BLM weed control specialist at the Miles City Field Office, one quickly notices the dried and framed weed specimens tacked to the wall near her workspace. They draw attention like a batch of wanted posters.



Flea beetles cover the flowering top of a leafy spurge plant at an infestation site near Grass Range July 7. The spurge-devouring beetles emerge during a brief period in the summer and are collected by BLM staff for relocation to other spurge sites in Montana.

A particularly devious specimen is included in the lineup: leafy spurge.

Witkowski noted that with the frequent rains this spring and summer, leafy spurge infestations have experienced a significant uptick. When she spoke about it, she sounded like a doctor relaying a grim prognosis.

"This year I've seen spurge like never before," said Witkowski. "It's not in small patches; it's in big, big, patches. Some areas have just exploded with spurge."

Witkowski and the BLM are looking for persons interested in receiving free spurge-devouring flea beetles to fight spurge infestations on public and private ground. A waiting list for the hungry insects has been compiled, but more cooperators are needed.

"They're free and we can get a lot of them. In past years we've collected a million and this year we collected over 330,000," said Witkowski. "A lot of people could be receiving bugs, if we knew who wanted them."

## Leafy Spurge a Challenging Foe

The phrase "truth is stranger than fiction" applies to leafy spurge, which behaves more like a hostile other-worldly alien than the Eurasian weed that it is. In North America

--where its natural predators are absent-- life is good for spurge. It grows bigger, reproduces faster and sucks up more nutrients; out-competing native and beneficial plants. Wherever spurge finds the conditions right, that's where it wants to be.

According to the Plant Conservation Alliance, leafy spurge caught a ride into the U.S. early in the 1800s. Transported unwittingly as a "seed impurity," it was first recorded in Massachusetts in 1827; first labeled a "weed" in a 1921 New York Herald editorial, and by 1979 it was plaguing at least 30 states.

Currently the noxious invader has found a home across most of the northern part of the U.S. Unfortunately, Montana, the Dakotas, Nebraska and Wyoming have been awarded the dubious distinction of hosting the worst infestations.

Leafy spurge uses a variety of tricks to out-compete native plant species. Spurge also spreads rhizominously underground; horizontally enlarging the colony from deep, fibrous, extensive root systems capable of burrowing to depths of more than 30 feet. Spurge infestations enlarge their perimeters by several feet annually.

Spurge also jettisons seed capsules up to a radius of 15 feet --which can remain viable seven to eight years before germinating. The weed can hitchhike on water, by wildlife, or tire tread and will establish quickly on disturbed or burned ground.

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BLM staffers Ryan Browning and Eric Peterson from Miles City collect flea beetles from a Fergus County leafy spurge infestation site for distribution to other Montana counties July 7. Approximately 1.526 million flea beetles were gathered from collection efforts this year and distributed to waiting list of recipients.



## Flea Beetles a Key Weapon against Spurge

Several control methods can be used against spurge, including spraying chemical, livestock (sheep and goat) grazing, or the cheapest method: flea beetles. The speck-sized bugs are a creature whose life cycle is linked to spurge, hailing from Eurasia where the plant evolved.

According to the North Dakota State University Extension Service, “flea beetle” is a common name for several beetle species that jump quickly with enlarged hind legs when disturbed. Two species, one black (*Aphthona lacertosa*) and one brown (*Aphthona nigristis*), were vetted via an extensive process and approved as bio control agents for spurge in the mid-1980s.



BLM Rangeland Management Specialist Beth Klempel prepares cardboard containers to hold flea beetles for shipment during a beetle collection in Fergus County July 7. The containers were distributed to persons on a waiting list, who later released the beetles onto other Montana spurge sites.

The beetles eat spurge exclusively and will die out once a colony expires if they can't find their way to more spurge. It is thought that latex compounds in spurge are a key factor in the relationship between flea beetles and their exclusive dining, life cycle and habitat requirements.

Flea beetles --albeit slower than more expensive methods-- are an effective, year-long tool according to Mike Barrick, a BLM range technician and weed specialist for the Lewistown Field Office. Barrick has been supervising flea beetle collection efforts in Fergus County for several years. Working steadily, the beetles attack spurge stems and roots; remaining viable underground through the winter to emerge briefly in the summer as adults to mate. Eggs are laid in the soil and the larvae hatch to feed on spurge roots and rhizomes.

“Ninety percent of your control is in the larval stage with flea beetles on the root structure,” said Barrick. “You’ll see the leafy spurge start to disappear and every year it’ll be less and less and less; the plant above ground is actually

being reduced because the root structure isn’t in the ground anymore.”

## Montana Grown Flea Beetles Sent Far and Wide

This summer, BLM staff from Miles City and Lewistown collected beetles from several “super sites” and provided them to landowners for release. According to Barrick, a whopping 1.526 million of the Lilliputian-sized spurge-killers were butterfly-netted, measured out and dumped into cardboard containers for delivery to waiting recipients this year. The process is quick, and the flea beetles are scattered back onto new spurge plants soon after being captured.

“Our collection period is only about a month long,” said Barrick. “We usually start collecting the last week of June and finish about the end of the third week in July. Every year varies a little. We have a short collection time when the adult flea beetles are on the soil surface and plant tops.”

Spurge control efforts in Yellowstone, Bighorn, Fergus, Blaine, Musselshell, Cascade, Sweetgrass, Custer, Prairie, Powder River and Fallon counties received beetles this summer. In previous collections, the Montana-bred beetles have also been sent to Arizona, Utah, California, Washington, Oregon, Idaho and upstate New York.

“Our site in Grass Range is one of our main collections sites for Montana and for the western United States,” said Barrick. “In fact, it’s well known in the bio control world that Fergus County, Montana, is a good place to go and collect.”

## Flea Beetles Only One Piece of the Puzzle

Barrick advised that even though using flea beetles is an inexpensive approach, landowners need to have a realistic expectation regarding the time it takes to produce results. It may take two or three years before the bugs reach high enough numbers to reduce the root structures enough for the effects to be visible.

“They’re not the silver bullet, they’re not the cure-all,” said Barrick. “We still need to graze with sheep and goats, we still need to apply chemical; flea beetles are just one of our tools in controlling noxious weeds. You still need an integrated approach with different things to see what works best in your particular site.”

Regardless of the combinations used on infested areas, the beetles are still a good bet and can get to work until more aggressive measures like spraying or grazing can be employed, said Witkowski.

“The bugs work really well in areas that are really rough and hard to get back into. At least it’s something instead of letting it go all over unchecked,” said Witkowski. “In years past we’ve dropped them from helicopter in really rough areas we couldn’t get into.”

In addition to flea beetles the BLM is offering chemical pesticide to persons with a current pesticide applicator's license wanting to spray for noxious weeds on adjacent BLM land.

"All the applicant has to do is fill out the application record and we'll provide the chemical to spray on BLM land," said Witkowski. "It helps us stretch our dollars further. Folks know where the weeds are, too."

For more information regarding flea beetles or weed control, contact: Brenda Witkowski, Miles City Field Office (406-233-2800) or Mike Barrick, Lewistown Field Office (406-538-1900).

For more BLM weed information go to: <http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/more/weeds.html> or visit the Montana Weed Control Association at: <http://www.mtweed.org/>. For more information regarding spurge control using flea beetles, see the North Dakota State University Agriculture Extension Service at: <http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/pubs/plantsci/weeds/w1183w.htm>

## Russians Visit Weatherman Draw

*Ann Boucher, MSO; and Susie Becker, Altai Assistance Project*

September 25 was an international event at Weatherman Draw south of Bridger, Mont. Three Russian students and their interpreter went there with BLM archeologists and other local experts to learn about the area's cultural sites and how

they are protected and managed - knowledge that the students will apply in their own country.

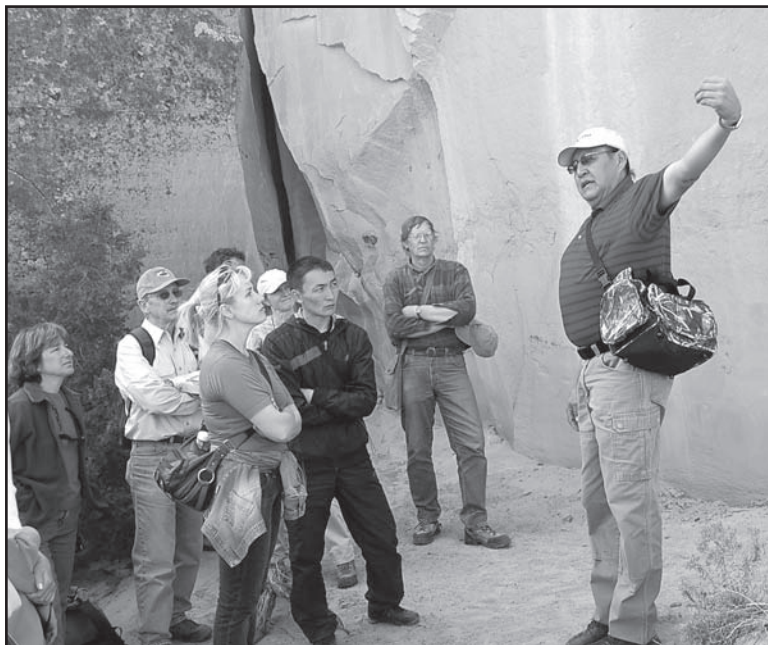
The gathering was initiated by the Altai Assistance Project ([www.altaiassistanceproject.org](http://www.altaiassistanceproject.org)), a non-profit organization based in

Wadhams, N.Y., in the Adirondack Park. The AAP helps the Altai Republic, a small ethnic republic of Russia, with the conservation and development of its environment and communities.

The Altai Republic is located on the southwestern edge of Siberia where Russia borders Kazakhstan, China and Mongolia. It is an unspoiled and undeveloped land of forests, open rangeland, and mountain peaks as high as 15,000 feet. Of the 200,000 people in the Altai Republic, approximately 60,000 are native Altains. Agriculture, mostly livestock, is the primary occupation, although tourism is becoming important. Physically, the Altai resembles Montana and the Altai visitors felt very much at home here.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and as the Russian economy has improved, the Altai is seeing increasing tourism and pressure from developers. So far there are few facilities or designated areas for tourists, and the growing tourism rate is impacting both the natural environment and the traditional way of life.

*Continued...*



Hubert Two Leggins shares a Crow legend with the group at Valley of the Shields. Some of the shield figure pictographs are on the rock wall behind him. *Photo by Ann Boucher*



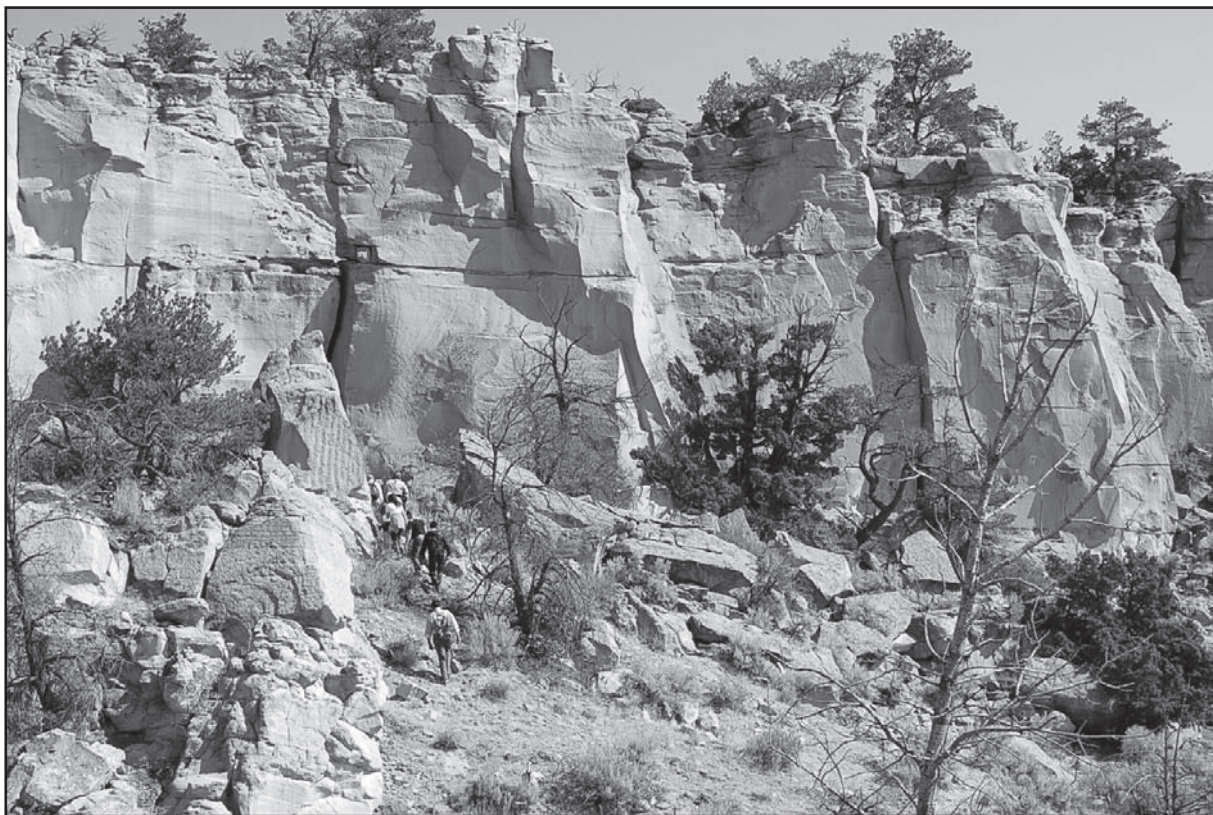
The Altai people want to protect their sacred sites and culture from overdevelopment and privatization of land. To that end, the AAP is helping them develop plans for land use, eco-tourism, and wildlife management. One of their methods is to sponsor reciprocal visits of land use professionals between the U.S. and the Altai. The subject of each exchange is based on the needs and interests of the Altai.

The stop at Weatherman Draw was part of a larger, two-week tour of Yellowstone National Park and surrounding region during which the students saw many natural and cultural treasures. Weatherman Draw was of great interest to the Altai guests. There is an ancient culture, and the Altai countryside boasts petroglyphs and rock art which are being threatened by tourism and encroaching development. They are looking for ways to protect their national treasures and were anxious to see how these artifacts are protected in the U.S.

The visiting Russian students are the three top graduates of a 500-hour course called "Biodiversity Conservation by Preparation of Tourism Guides" at the University of Gorno Altaisk in the Altai Republic. Although they all know some English, the three communicated primarily through an interpreter. Anna Mashegova is a student in the natural sciences and wants to be an agent for developing tourism in the Altai. Pavel Aronov is a mathematics student and works as

an enforcement officer in one of the national parks (Zapovedniks) in the Altai. Ejer Pavlov is a native Altain and works as a tour guide at Tarhatinskoye Lake. Interpreter Natalya Yurkova is a professor of English and Dean of International Studies at GASU. Their driver, Susie Becker, is a volunteer with the AAP in New York.

Several people had a hand in making the trip to Weatherman Draw worthwhile for everyone. Carolyn Sherve-Bybee, archeologist for the Billings Field Office, arranged the logistics. Other participants were Michael Brody, a professor of Science Education at MSU-Bozeman who is developing an exchange program with the University in Gorno Altaisk; Dr. Dudley Gardner from Western Wyoming College, who is conducting a systematic cultural inventory of Weatherman Draw and the surrounding area for the BLM Billings Field Office; Jone Balenaivalu of Fiji, whose job is the equivalent to the State Historic Preservation Officer here in the U.S.; Wayne Paulsen from the BioRegions project in Colorado; Gary Smith, archeologist from the BLM Montana State Office; Melissa Passes, natural resource specialist with the Billings Field Office; Jeanne Moe from BLM-Washington Office, who works with MSU-Bozeman to develop environmental education materials; and Hubert Two Leggins, who shared oral histories and legends of the Crow Tribe with the group.





# Attention BLM Retirees

## The BLM Retirees Association

Stay in touch! The BLM Retirees Association has a social gathering at 11:30 a.m. on the first Tuesday of even-numbered months at Guadalajara in the Riverboat Casino (444 S. 24th St. West) in Billings. If you would like to receive email or postcard notifications of these meetings, please call Shirley Heffner at 259-1202, Cynthia Embretson at 252-1367, or send your address to Cynthia at ceatsage@wtp.net.

## The Public Lands Foundation

The Public Lands Foundation (PLF) offers new retirees a free one-year membership. If you're interested, contact David Mari, Montana PLF Representative, at (406) 538-7121, or email dmari@earthlink.net (please note "PLF" on the subject line).

What is the PLF? It works to keep America's public lands in public hands, managed professionally and sustainably for responsible common use and enjoyment.

The goals of the PLF are to:

- Keep lands managed by the BLM in public ownership and open to use by the public.
- Support multiple use management under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act.
- Encourage professionalism by BLM employees.
- Increase the public's understanding of and support for the proper management of the public lands.

Although PLF membership consists largely of retired BLMers, current employees and anyone interested in the goals of the organization are welcome to join.

## Get on the NoteWorthy News Mailing List

The Montana/Dakotas BLM also produces the NoteWorthy News, a monthly electronic newsletter for employees and retirees. If you would like to receive a copy, send your email address to aboucher@blm.gov.

## Retired since August 1, 2009:

Michael Small - 34 years  
Forester, Butte Field Office

Sandra Padilla - 38 years  
Park Ranger, Lewistown Field Office

Jonathan Collins - 30 years  
Outdoor Recreation Planner, Glasgow Field Office

William Gibson - 26 years  
Civil Engineering Technician, Butte Field Office

Tim Sorensen - 36 years  
Civil Engineering Technician, Lewistown Field Office

Chun Wong - 34 years  
Supvy. Petroleum Engineer, Montana State Office

Mark H Olson - 20 years  
Engineering Equipment Operator, Butte Field Office

Judith Goffe - 29 years  
Resource Assistant, Missoula Field Office

Harvey Wolff - 31 years  
Engineering Equipment Operator, Miles City Field Office

Tom Daer - 35 years  
Forester, Missoula Field Office

Fredrick Roberts - 30 years  
Wildlife Biologist, Lewistown Field Office

Kathy Ives - 34 years  
Printing Specialist, Montana State Office

Edwin Mayberry - 23 years  
Range Technician (Logistics Coordinator), Miles City Field Office

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